



FACT SHEET FOR POLYTRAUMA AND TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides world-class medical and rehabilitation services for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Polytrauma. VA's Polytrauma/TBI System of Care is an integrated nationwide network of over 100 facilities with specialized rehabilitation programs for Veterans and Servicemembers with TBI and Polytrauma. Facilities are coordinated across four tiers of care that ensures access to the appropriate level of rehabilitation services based on the needs of the Veteran. The 5 Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers provide the provide acute, comprehensive, inpatient rehabilitation for severely injured Veterans and Servicemembers, and serve as consultants to other facilities in the Polytrauma System of Care; 23 Polytrauma Network Sites offer continued specialized rehabilitation, evaluation, and treatment services for patients who are transitioning closer to home; 87 Polytrauma Support Clinic Teams provide ongoing specialized care, rehabilitation, and community re-integration services near the patient's home community; and, 39 Polytrauma Points of Contact facilitate referrals and access for care.

WHAT IS TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI)?

A TBI happens when something outside the body hits the head with significant force. It could happen when a piece of shrapnel enters the brain, with high impact injuries to the head, or during blast exposure from an improvised explosive device (IED).

TBI often occurs in the context of Polytrauma. Polytrauma occurs with two or more injuries to physical regions or organ systems, one of which may be life threatening that result in physical, cognitive, psychological, or psychosocial impairments, and functional disability.

TBI SYMPTOMS

When TBI occurs, the injury can range from mild (a brief change in mental status or consciousness) to severe (an extended period of unconsciousness or memory loss after the injury).

RELATED EFFECTS

Some effects of TBI are most visible just after the injury. For most people, these effects will subside with time.

Other behavioral and cognitive effects may be more complicated and include: difficulty remembering, making decisions, solving problems, and performing day-to-day functions like driving a car,

dressings, or bathing.

TBI SCREENING AND EVALUATION

In 2007, VA initiated a TBI screening for all Veterans with a separation date after September 11, 2001, and who served in Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom. As of the end of FY12, VA had screened over 650,000 Veterans for possible TBI.

Veterans with a positive TBI screen are referred for a comprehensive evaluation with specialty providers who determine a definitive diagnosis. An individualized Rehabilitation and Reintegration Treatment Plan of Care is developed for those





Veterans that need ongoing rehabilitation services.

INTEGRATED CARE

Due to the severity and complexity of their injuries, Veterans and Servicemembers with TBI and Polytrauma can require an extraordinary level of care and other support services.

The hallmark of TBI and Polytrauma rehabilitation in the VA is the interdisciplinary, patient-centered approach to care. This entails designing integrated plans of care that address Veterans' needs and goals.

Other important benefits of VA's PSC include coordinated system-wide care management, patient and family education and training, and psychosocial support.

SPECIALIZED REHABILITATION

VA continually improves access to specialized rehabilitation services for Veterans with TBI and Polytrauma. Programs include:

- Assistive Technology Labs, to maximize the functional status

of Veterans with disabilities through the use of technology;

- Transitional Rehabilitation Programs, focusing on promoting independence and community re-integration after injury;
- Telehealth monitoring options for Veterans with mild TBI living in their communities;
- Drivers' Training Programs providing assessments and training for adaptive driving;
- Emerging Consciousness Programs, serving Veterans who are slow to recover consciousness after severe brain injuries;
- A five-year pilot to provide Assistive Living for Veterans with TBI, executed through contracts with non-VA TBI residential living programs.

OUTCOMES

VA tracks and compares TBI rehabilitation outcomes of Veterans with TBI to those from the private sector. An interagency agreement between VA and the Department of Education established a parallel research project for the five VA Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers based on the existing

Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems (TBIMS) database.

This collaboration enhances VA's ability to study rehabilitation and longitudinal functional outcomes on patients who have suffered a TBI.

VA outcomes compare favorably to those from the TBIMS, both in percentages of patients discharged to home and the percentage of patients who are independent at one-year follow up.

RESEARCH

VA funds research projects investigating all areas of TBI.

These TBI research projects explore a wide-range of topics including neuro-imaging, co-morbid conditions, and cognitive therapies.

Current research includes "The National Health Study for a New Generation of U.S. Veterans," one of the largest scientific studies ever undertaken on the health of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other recent Veterans. TBI is one of the many health outcomes that researchers will examine in this 10-year study of 60,000 Veterans.

